

THE HEAD.

BY MRS. HUBERT BLAND.

I.

F your personal appearance is best described by the enumeration of your clothes, your character by the trademark on the gilt waistband of your cigar, and your profession as "just anything that comes along, don't you know," you are not exactly the right man in the right place, up to your knees in mud, your carriage with a wheel off lying prone in a ditch several fields off, and your chance of getting to the house where a capricious music-hall star has given you an inconvenient rendezvous less than the least crumb of the biscuit you wish you had put in your pocket before starting.

Morris Diehl cursed his luck in the grey of a winter's dusk. His driver had left the carriage and gone back with the horses to the inn where he had lunched. His boots were full of water, his high hat seamed and scratched by the lean-fingered trees that stooped here and there over the stone walls. His cigar, long since cold, its end wet and flattened and gnawed, lay foul between his lips. He threw it away. He was lost, beyond a doubt—lost on these confounded Derbyshire hills, where every field is just the same as every other field, and the stone walls have no more of individual distinction than the faint blue-grey lines of a copy-book.

If he had only had the sense to stay where the coachman had left him, or, better still, at the inn—the inn down in the valley, where the station was—where there were lights and voices and things to drink! Tottie de Vere, the star on whom hung all the hopes of his newest venture—a company for promoting *café chantants* in Manchester, Liverpool, and Bolton—had declined to give him any appointment save this; he might call on her between six and seven at Sir Alexander Brisbane's, the grey house with acres of glass, ten miles from anywhere. And he had tried to keep the appointment—tried with unreasonable determination, and—there he was.

Lights and voices—and things to drink. To eat also; for Mr. Diehl was not only thirsty, he was hungry as well, and cold and lonely. He thought of the Strand and the lights of the Strand, lights from restaurants and theatres, where one smelt the French

cooking, and the patchouli, and the Regalias. These were to him what, to some of us, the home pastures and the scent of stocks and wood-smoke are. He had waited by the carriage till he had grown certain that all men were alike, and that his driver would, warmed and comforted in the ale-house, not be such a fool as to keep his promise and come back "with a trap." He had walked up and down the road for a while, the bleak wind nuzzling in between his neck and the fur collar of his big coat; and then he had started to reach Sir Alexander's on foot, had seen a light, and been beguiled by it to what he esteemed a short cut. Even if it were not Sir Alexander's light, yet any light meant a possible fire—shelter, at any rate, from that too intimate north-easter.

He was going now, difficultly, towards the light; across fields and over the eternal sameness of grey walls—black they seemed in that sombre twilight of cold stars. Beyond the last wall was a little hill-brook. He was in it almost knee-deep before he guessed at anything worse than the cold, muddy grass of the pastures. The next wall had a gate; he saw the blacker blank and made for it. His fur-lined coat caught on its hasp and ripped, loudly. And his hat was struck by some silly arch or other above the gate, and fell, rolling hollowly on the flags.

Mr. Diehl exploded passionately. He groped for the hat in the dark dampness, found it, and then he was at the door of the cottage whose windows, all alight, had beckoned him from afar.

"There must be a wedding or a wake," said he. "Copy, either way." He was, casually, a journalist, when financial enterprises were cold to him.

He knocked. He had not been conscious of any movement in the house, but now he was conscious of a cessation of movement, and of a silence as though something inside the house were holding its breath.

"Who's there?" The voice came from behind the door—low down, as though the speaker had been trying to look out into the dark through the keyhole.

"I've lost my way," said Mr. Diehl.

"You'll find it, some way or other," said the voice.

"I'm very wet—and tired. I should be very grateful for a night's lodging, sir."

E. Nesbit-Bland.



"*'THERE MUST BE A WEDDING OR A WAKE,' SAID HE.*"

He added the "sir" because the note of the voice was distinctly feminine, and he saw that the door would open more readily to one whose honesty of purpose was so clear and fine that it could persist even in the fact of the conviction that there was "a man in the house." Mr. Diehl's mind—it was not the mind of a fool—pictured a faded woman, her terror at this late visit soothed and charmed by the solid compliments it was part of his trade to sow broadcast, with both hands, on any soil. The harvest, he knew, rarely failed.

"Ah, have pity," he said, all the pathos of a hundred melodramas reinforcing the earnest pleading of gross physical discomfort. "I am lost on these wild moors—I shall die if you do not assist me. Have pity on me and Heaven will reward you."

"You can go back the way you came," said the voice.

"I shall die," he said, piteously, but very distinctly, as his elocution master had taught him in the days when he meant to be an actor. "I shall die if you turn me away. My death will be at your door. Ah, save me, for the love of Heaven."

"For the love of Heaven," the voice repeated, slowly. "For the love—"

The rest was lost in the rusty withdrawal of bolts. The door creaked open a brilliant inch.

"No one's crossed this door this ten years past," said the voice; "but I can't let a human creature perish by fire or by cold. For the love of Heaven—come in."

The door was flung back. Within was a little square hall or lobby; narrow stairs led up in front of Mr. Diehl. To the right a closed door; to the left the outer door held open.

"Go and stand on the stairs," said the thin treble voice, "till I get the door shut."

From the stairs Morris watched to see the door closed by that spare, fluttering woman's form. But it was a man who shut the door and barred it, and then turned to the visitor the cold, calm face of one wholly self-possessed.

"Come in," he said. "Since you *are* here I'll do what I can for you. Get outer your wet things. I'll go fetch you a change."

Diehl, alone in a fire-lit kitchen, threw the wet fur coat across a brown wood settle, loosened his squelching patent leather boots, and heard above him the muffled sound of footsteps on old, worm-eaten boards, the creak of old beams, the opening and shutting of drawers and presses.

He had got to bare feet and a costume like that of a Corsican brother in reduced and muddy circumstances when his host returned, an armful of clothing over his arm.

"Here," he said, in his thin treble, "get into these. It'll be easy. I was a bigger man than ever you'll be."

He was now a smaller man—smaller by the stooping shoulders, the narrow chest, the yellow leanness of wrists and neck—by, in a word, age. He was an old man, white-haired and pale. Nothing was young in face or figure, save only the eyes—and they would not have shone amiss in the face of an adventurer of twenty.

Hot gin and water, the generous half of a Yorkshire pie, one's feet in borrowed large shoes among the grey ashes, to whose centre fire had been forced to life by big bellows; Morris Diehl expanded—and, expanded, he looked better than in his fur coat. He

was resolved to stay the night. He pledged his host again and again in the hot, sugary drink, furtively adding strength to the other's glass from the brown demijohn whenever the old man left the fire for more wood, or to fill the kettle, or to bring out his tobacco-jar from the disused oven where he stored it—"to keep it moist," he said. He grew more cordial, and Diehl, who was by nature an actor anywhere but on the boards, which paralyzed him, set so gay a tune of good fellowship that the other's mind soon danced to it.

"I'm glad I let you in. Yes, I'm very glad I broke my vow. You're a good fellow, sir, pardoning the liberty, and this night's the whitest I've known for ten years. How old would you take me to be now?"

The question was awkward. As a woman of thirty is said to subtract passionately to make a total of twenty-seven, so men who are far gone in their seventies will add to their years, and claim your amazed admiration as gaffers of eighty-six.

Diehl looked hard at the old man.

He would have liked to rest his decision on the spinning of a coin.

"Not much past sixty," struck him as a tactful compromise.

The old man laughed, well pleased, as it seemed.

"I'm forty-three come Lady Day and seven days beyond," he said. "I was born on All Fools' Day three-and-forty years ago and christened April, by the same token, like the fool I am. April Vane's my name. 'Vane by name and vain by nature,' they used to

say when I was a young man—though you wouldn't think it to look at me now."

"I beg your pardon." Diehl had no other counter ready.

"Not at all, sir, not at all," the old man rejoined. "It 'ud be a wonder if you could guess my age. Why, my hair went white, like you see it, in three days."

"You had some shock, I suppose?" said Morris, and he sipped the hot gin. "It's a sad world, Heaven help us."

"I don't tell my story to strangers," said the other, with shrill, sudden dignity.

"I trust," said Diehl, in his best manner, "that I can sympathize with another man's sorrows without seeking to thrust myself into his confidence."

Even as he spoke he saw how well the old man, the remote house, the air of mystery would serve him in an article for the *Daily Bellower*, could he but learn the secret of this hermit's grief. He saw

the head-lines:

AN ENGLISH
HERMIT.
TRAGIC STORY.

A BROKEN
LIFE.

"No," said the other, "no, of course not. You're a gentleman. Any-one could see that—let alone your fur coat."

"I've known trouble myself," said the guest, and told a tale, a long tale full of pathetic incidents, a tale whose *dénouement* may have been suggested by the prostrate stump of a cigar against the leg of the table —by that, or by something more subtle.

"I saw my angel girl," he ended, "at the window of that burning house. How could I save her? I rushed forward. 'Darling!' I cried, 'I am coming to rescue you!' I



"I'M GLAD I LET YOU IN. YES, I'M VERY GLAD I BROKE MY VOW."

plunged among the burning débris, and knew no more till I woke in hospital with a broken heart—and this."

He pulled up the sleeve and showed a scar—got in a drunken fight with a Jew in Johannesburg—the weapons whisky bottles.

"They cured my face-burns," he added, smoothing his heavy moustache; "these hardly show, even by daylight, but that scar I shall carry to my grave."

There was a silence. Then—

"Why did you go on living?" asked the other man, his voice tense as the string of a violin.

"I—oh—my poor old mother," said Diehl, whose mother had died in giving birth to him, her only child; "for her sake, don't you know, and my little sister."

"I went on living," said the other man, and now his voice was no longer like stretched wire, but like the sharp, unyielding blade of a steel poniard. "I went on living because—"

There was a silence. Diehl could almost hear his heart beat, so sure he was that there was here material for head-lines, so keen was he to secure it.

He sighed elaborately. "Ah," he said, "it is a relief to tell your troubles to someone who understands."

He was quite right to say it. He really sometimes had a wonderful *flair* for the things to be said and not to say.

"Does it *really*?" asked the man with the young eyes—"relief, I mean? I've lived here ten years, and never a word except when I bought the things I needed. Does talking help? Are you sure? Doesn't it open the old wounds wide till the blood squirts out of them? Don't you wish afterwards that you'd held your silly tongue? Aren't you ashamed and afraid and sick with yourself for every word that's passed your lips about *her*?"

"No," said Diehl, slowly, stretching his feet towards the ash's red centre; "no. But then I've never told my story to anyone but you. There's something about you—I don't know what it is—that makes me feel I can trust you. So I'm glad I've told you my story. If it's not bored you?"

The last five words were a misdeal, but the other man did not notice it.

"I don't know," he said; "you may be right, and perhaps, if I told someone I could trust, my brain and heart would leave off feeling as though they were going to burst and make my clean floor all in a mess. You don't think I'm mad, do you?"

It was just what he was thinking. So, suddenly, very anxious to be alone, with a locked door between him and his host, he said, hastily: "Not at all. But I see I've awakened painful memories with my talk. Will you let me sleep here—on the settle—on the floor—anywhere? I don't want a bed. I won't give an ounce of trouble. May I?"

"May you what?"

"Spend the night," said Diehl, and, laboriously explaining, added: "Sleep here, you know."

"In this house?"

"Of course."

"Yes." The answer was very strong, very definite. "You shall sleep here, in this house—if you can. But first I should like to show you the reason why I never sleep in this house. I sleep in the croft when it's warm, and when it's winter in the shippenn. But I keep the lights burning all night in every room."

"I don't half like this," Morris Diehl told himself, and perceived that attractive headlines may be bought too dearly. Aloud he said: "I'm so tired I could sleep anywhere. I believe I'm almost asleep now. Won't you show me whatever it is to-morrow?"

"To-morrow may never come," said the host, cheerfully. "I'll go first—just to turn up the lights and that. Then you shall see."

He went out, quite quietly and soberly, and Mr. Diehl shivered. Now that he was warm and gin-filled, the bleak, windy hillside, the chess-board of those confounded stone walls, seemed a security lightly thrown away.

"Alone with a lunatic," he mused, "in a house a hundred miles from anywhere." He fingered a short, broad knife whose sheath fitted closely against his hip.

"If the worst comes to the worst—in self-defence," he assured himself. "But all the same I jolly well wish I was jolly well out of it. Silly lunatic!"

"Come, *now!*" said the voice of the silly lunatic, and said it so trustfully, yet so compellingly, that Mr. Diehl rose and followed it, half reassured, half curious, and wholly overmastered.

"It's in the cellar," said the voice; "people do pry so."

Mr. Diehl drew back; he could not help it.

"You're not afraid of a *cellar*?" said the voice; "besides, it's what we used to call a basement in London."

Morris Diehl felt his knife's comforting weight and followed the voice.

The stairs were of stone, broad and

shallow—there were many of them. The wavering yellow light of the lamp the other man carried showed the stairs neatly yellowed, as the North Country lovingly yellows the stones which make the floors to its homes.

The stairs ended in a flagged passage, with doors. Outside the right-hand door the lamp-bearer paused.

"You told me your story with words," said he, and his language as well as his very intonation had changed. Before he had spoken in colourless accents. Now he spoke in the very key of uneducated London. "I never heard so many words all different in all my born days. I haven't got no power of jaw like that there. You told me your story, and it's the same as my story. That's why I'm a-going to show you my story. 'Cause I can't use my tongue worth tuppence—but my hands I can. Now don't you be frightened; it ain't real."

Mr. Diehl reassured himself with a laugh.

"I'm not so easily frightened," he said.

"Nor don't you laugh neither," said the other man, with sudden breathless intensity. "I couldn't answer for myself what I should do if you was to laugh in there. It's the work of my hands. And I love the work of my hands same as Almighty God did. Don't you go to laugh in there, sir, or it'll be the worse for both of us. But you wouldn't." His voice grew suddenly tender. "Ain't you showed me your 'art — put it into my 'and to look at? Don't I know you?"

The dramatic instinct taught Mr. Diehl to hold out his hand in the dim lamplight and press the other man's, with a fine show of manly emotion.

"I was a stonemason by trade," said the host; "apprenticed in the King's Road,

Chelsea, I was. That's how I got the hang of it."

Mr. Diehl had a sudden, swift vision of an elaborate monument erected in the cellar over the body of the victim of homicidal mania.

"Now!" said the other, and flung open the door.

Mr. Diehl was prepared for a shock of some kind, but he was not prepared for the shock he got.

The opened door disclosed a village street, lit warm and red—a village street at night. It was the village where the inn was that he wished he had stayed at—where the lights were, and the voices, and the drinks. There, by the same token, was the inn, its sign emblazoned with the arms of the local landowner, lit redly by the flames of conflagration. There was the square church tower, flushed

against a dark sky; the tombstones in the raised churchyard gleaming rosy beneath the yew shadows. There was a crowd in the street—men with pails and cans of water. This side of the inn half the street was in flames; from the window of a burning house a girl leaned out; below, a man holding a ladder was in the act of planting it against the window. At his feet lay a body—a dead man, as it seemed, but not dead by burning. Blood showed at mouth and nose. The whole thing was worked out, with wax and wood and paint and paper and a dozen odd yet adequate materials, at much less than half life, but so perfect were the perspective and the proportion that that scene would have appeared to a spectator half-way up the village street just as, and not otherwise than, it now appeared to the spectator at the cellar door. The peculiar and desperate terror—the mad, splendid heroism that fire engenders—these were here, visible to the onlooker.



"HE FINGERED A SHORT, BROAD KNIFE WHOSE SHEATH FITTED CLOSELY AGAINST HIS HIP."



"SPLendid! RIPPING!" THE WORDS SPRANG TO MR. DIEHL'S LIPS."

"Splendid! Ripping!" The words sprang to Mr. Diehl's lips—and stayed there. The other man was speaking, and in a low, thin, untroubled voice.

"That's me," he said, "with the ladder. And that dog in the gutter—that's him she threw me over for. He was my mate, too, one time. She was Mrs. Dog, her that was to have been Mrs. April Vane. But I loved her. That's her, leanin' out of their bedroom window. And when the fire broke out, where was he? In heaven, where he'd got the right to be by the marriage-lines? Not him! He was in the public, silly drunk. When I

come along he was crying—crying there in front of the house where she was a-burning, crying and shivering and saying, 'Oh, I shall be burnt; I know I shall.' And she was screaming, 'For God's sake, save the child!'"

"What did you do?" Mr. Diehl's voice was tactfully attuned.

"Knocked him down, of course. Thought I'd killed him; wish I had. Then, when I'd got the ladder and set it up against the window, I was three-quarters up it when the window-frame went smash—burnt from underneath. I never seed him again. He went to London, I've heard say. But I've made his face; you go in an' look, and you'll see the man I wish I'd swung for. If he'd bin where he ought to 'a' bin—but he left her all alone, her and the kid that wasn't three days old."

Again Morris wrung his hand. The vision of attractive head-lines had faded, grown dim, vanished in the red glow of the burning village.

He walked gingerly into the picture and looked closely at the wax puppets. Perfect in every detail, each little effigy was in itself a finer work of art even than the tableau which included them all.

"It's—it's beautiful," said Morris Diehl. "I never saw anything like it."

"It's taken me my life to make," said its maker.

"But why did you make it so small—why not life-size? There'd have been room—for part of it, anyway."

"Money," came sharply the reply. "I've only got the house and the croft, and thirty pound a year that come too late for me to marry her."

"The whole thing's a marvel. You ought to have been a sculptor with a proper studio and all that," said the guest.

"I ought to have been a married man with kids of my own," said the host.

"Wouldn't you like to make them life-size?" Morris Diehl asked, gently.

"I'm putting by every week for that very thing."

"I could advance you the money," said the man who took his living where he found it.

"No; I won't be beholden to nobody." The tone was decisive.

"You needn't be beholden. Come to London. I'll find you a fine big room, twice the size of this; you shall make the things life-size—the best materials money can buy. We'll charge a shilling a head to come in and see it. You'll pay me back in no time, and make your fortune besides."

"I don't want to make my fortune," said the old man, staring with his young eyes at the blazing village street. "I want to get alongside of *him*."

"Well," said Mr. Diehl, "you're much more likely to do that in London than here, you know. Suppose he saw the outside of our show, having been in a fire himself it's a million to one he'd turn in to have a look, and then you could tell him what you thought of him."

"Do you think he would? Do you?"

"Certain of it," said Mr. Diehl, who thought nothing less likely.

"Then I'll do it. All life-size—life-size."

"You could have men to help you."

"Not with the faces. The houses and that I don't say. Not the faces."

"Of course not the faces," Mr. Diehl assented, cordially. "Let's come back to the fire and talk it over. And to-morrow we'll get the agreement signed—and Tottie de Vere can go to the deuce. This is a big thing we're in now."

"Eh?" the other party to the agreement queried. He had not heard. All his senses

were deep plunged in the joy of his masterpiece. He sighed at last and spoke.

"There ought to be *noise*," he said; "that's the worst thing about a fire; when it's taking hold it's as quiet as a mouse. When it's got hold it roars like a lion and screams—like a woman."

"We'll make it scream and roar. This thing's got to go. And it will go," said Morris Diehl.

II.

It did go. The whole picture—the graduated houses, the little figures of wood and wax and paper, the ingenious lanterns that lighted, the tinsel flames that gleamed—all was taken to London, and set up in a big attic in Fitzroy Street. Mr. Diehl brought men to see it. Men with shiny hats and fur coats, and cigars like his own. And when they had seen they went away and drank brandy and soda at marble-topped tables while Morris Diehl talked. And they "came into it" with him, as he had known they would. April Vane was shy and moody at first; would have no help; but when he saw the life-sized body produced by a trained workman from one of his own little models, he drew a long breath. "You may go ahead," he said. "I'll have more time for the faces."

It cost the enterprising Mr. Diehl a great deal of patience, and his enterprising friends a great deal of money. The big fight was over the subject of the tableau. Vane wanted to reproduce the village scene exactly as it had been burnt into his mind. Diehl wanted the Great Fire of London, with old London Bridge and the heads of the traitors above

the gate. But though Vane had been the other man's slave since the night he had thought that he had seen the other man's heart, he was obstinate till Diehl said: "More people will come to the Great Fire of London



"WHEN HE SAW THE LIFE-SIZED BODY PRODUCED BY A TRAINED WORKMAN HE DREW A LONG BREATH."

than just to a village fire ; you've got more chance of seeing *him*."

Then Vane yielded.

No expense was spared. The best scene-painters and carpenters that the syndicate could buy for money were bought. An eminent archaeologist was feed to advise, an expert in acoustics solved the problem of the roar of fire triumphant. The thing was boomed a month in advance by all the venal Press. A big room in the West-end that had failed as an art gallery was hired for this that should not fail. Vane was often wearied, often disheartened.

"I liked the other best," he said ; "that was mine. This will be everybody's."

"Wait till you see the real thing all put together," Diehl urged, continually. He was very gentle and patient. It was important to him to keep the old man's adoration alive. "That will be yours, and you'll never be able to leave it. You mark my words."

The old man marked them, and they came true.

The thing caught on. "Have you seen the Great Fire of London?" people asked each other between dances and during dinners, in the train and on the tops of omnibuses. "Like Mme. Tussaud's? Oh, no—not in the least. It's absolutely thrilling! Just for the first moment you can hardly believe it's not real. You *must* go!"

And everybody went.

And it was not like Mme. Tussaud's or like any waxwork show that ever was before. To the making of Mme. Tussaud's goes, perhaps, talent. To the making of the Musée Grévin, certainly, genius. But to the making of this went the heart and soul of a man.

And from the first moment when he saw the completed picture, perfect from the life-size figures in the foreground to the little paper figures in the far distance, he gave himself up to it, as to his real life. The interludes when he showed it to visitors, mechanically warned them not to pass its low barrier, explained it in a monologue learned by heart—these were dull dreams. The real moments were those when he was alone—could overstep the barriers, clap the hurrying soldier on the back, whisper encouragement to the old woman hastening away on her son's strong arm, calling shrilly by name these images of dead citizens who had been alive and furious in flight under the horror of that great blaze. For to him they were not strangers out of the time of the Second Charles ; each wore the face

of some man or woman in the Derbyshire village. But to his own effigy he never spoke, nor to the woman whose face looked out of the burning window, nor to the corpse that lay at the feet of the ladder-bearer. For now there was no room for doubt that it was the figure of a corpse. That change he had made without consulting Mr. Diehl and the syndicate. Its mouth was bloody, as had been the mouth of the little effigy in the Derbyshire cellar, and the mouth of the man whom he had struck down long ago under the eyes of the deserted wife. Only now the throat too was bloody.

"Oh, let him alone," said Mr. Diehl, when one of the syndicate remarked that, by Jove, it was just a bit too ghastly ; "it pleases him, and you can't lay the horror on too thick" for the B.P."

April Vane slept at his lodgings, but he did nothing else there—and not that every night. Sometimes he slept in the gallery on one of the red velvet seats, and always he ate and drank there, talking to the figures whenever he was alone with them. "They're company for me," he said, when Diehl tried remonstrance. And Diehl noted curiously that the life-sized figures did not hold for their maker the horror that, in the first little models, had driven him to sleep in barn or croft—anywhere but in the house where they were.

It was in August, when the crowd had worn thin, that Vane stayed away for one day. "I've seen *him*," he told Diehl, standing by his bedside very early, for he had told the hotel people that it was a matter of life and death. "I must have a day off ; I must try to find him."

"But who's to run the show?" asked Diehl, in his blue silk pyjamas and blue jowl.

"I must have my day off," said Vane. "I don't want to worry you, but I must have one day off. Shut the show up or run it yourself."

The show was that day run by Mr. Diehl. The takings were two bags of silver only that day—and that day the head was stolen. It was the head of the corpse broken off sharp at the neck, where the blood began. It was stolen, and the careless silk-hatted custodian knew no more than you and I who had done it.

Vane had not found the man he sought, but when he found out that theft he forgot the fruitless search. His grief was like that of a mother who loses her child—a woman who loses her lover.

"But it's all right," Diehl told him again

and again. "Throw the corner of the mantle up—so, and it'll never show. Or leave it as it is; it's pretty average ghastly like that."



"THAT DAY THE HEAD WAS STOLEN."

It was. But—

"I want his face," Vane said again and again.

"Well, then, for goodness' sake *make* his face." Diehl was losing patience a little at last. "Make his face again and have done with it!" he said, and lit one of his eternal cigars; "you can do it at home in the evenings."

"I can't do it," said Vane, very low. "I've been trying—I can't see his face."

"You sleep on it," said Mr. Diehl, cheerfully. "It'll come back to you all right in the morning. Besides, you've got the little model."

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"I cut the face off of that," said Vane, gently. "I cut it off a little bit at a time to see if it would bleed. I can't remember his face."

"That head must have been stolen for a lark," said Diehl. "Look here—I'll advertise for it, and we'll get it back all right."

"Yes," said Vane, with trembling eagerness. "Get it back. I must see his face."

He saw it next day, on the shoulders of a living man—a tall, thick-set man with dirty hands and a ready-made suit, who knocked at the gallery door just as it was being closed. The same face, but not the same expression.

"You were advertising for a head," said the man.

"Yes," said Vane. "Come in," and shut the door on the two of them.

"Well, I ain't goin' to name no names, but a pal of mine come in here day before yesterday, and one of your blessed dolls had got my pal's face. So he pinched it."

"Why?" Vane softly asked.

"Well, if a man ain't got a right to his own chump, what has he got a right to? But he'll let you have it back, but not for the fiver you offers. I take it if you offers five you'll give twenty. Say the word, and put it down in writing to prevent mistakes, and I'll guarantee you shall have the head."

"Yes," said Vane, "I shall have the head."

He advanced on the other man, and now, for the first time, his own face showed plainly.

"Heavens!" The man retreated, his hands held out to keep off—something; and now he looked like the head that he had stolen. "Great heavens, it's April Vane!"

"Yes, you'd better say your prayers. It is April Vane," April Vane said, and came at him.

It must have been a couple of days later that Diehl strolled in at closing-time with that member of the syndicate who had felt so squeamish about the cut throat. The lights were low. There was no blaze to illumine the picture, and the machine was silent that in the day roared and screamed in the very voice of fire.

"So you've got the head all right? You remembered? I told you you would," said Mr. Diehl, glancing at the corpse.

"Yes," said old April. "I've got the head—I remembered."

Mr. Diehl went into the enclosure, and the cinders crunched under his boots.

"By Jove!" he said, "you're an artist, Vane. I say, Montague, look at this corpse, the thing you didn't like—why, it's the best of the lot. You've improved it, Vane, old chap. It's just the old expression, but, by George! it's more life-like than ever. What is it? Something in the lie of the body, I suppose. It's just like life—isn't it, now, Monty?"

"It's more like death," said Montague. "I don't like it. And it's stuffy in here, and

the place is as quiet as a churchyard. Come along out."

"You're a schoolgirl, Montague—a silly schoolgirl! I believe you're frightened of the thing."

Mr. Diehl kicked it contemptuously and without violence.

"Good night, Vane. Why don't you go to one of the halls and have a gay evening? I'll stand treat."

"You're always kind," said Vane, gratefully, "but all the evenings will be gay now. I have got the head. I have remembered."

The two members of the Great Fire Syndicate went out into the light of Regent Street.

"Ugh!" said Montague; "that place gives me the horrors."

"It's jolly well meant to," said Diehl, handing out his cigar-case. "That corpse—"

"It's not canny," said Montague, and he laughed, not quite easily. "Why, it makes me

fancy—— I say, what's that on your boot? Heavens! man, it's blood, as the chap says in the story."

"Don't talk rot," said Diehl. He did not see that his right foot had stained the pavement.

Montague stooped.

"But—it is blood," he said.



"YES, YOU'D BETTER SAY YOUR PRAYERS. IT IS APRIL VANE," APRIL VANE SAID, AND CAME AT HIM."